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19 APR 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Personnel

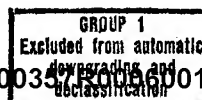
SUBJECT : Inflation of Fitness Report Ratings and Advisability  
of Fitness Report Training Course

1. In thinking about the subject for several weeks, it has become apparent that regardless of intention, our Fitness Report system seeks to obtain an appraisal of the employee both individually and as a member of a group having comparable grade status and experience. This result comes about in the following manner.

a. In rating on specific duties, the supervisor can and does consider the individual separately in relation to a varying number of tasks against a norm in which productivity is the main determinant of the rating. This multi-factor analysis can be quite objective. It is performance oriented and clear-cut, and can be the occasion of a constructive exchange between supervisor and individual.

b. In rating on Overall performance, the supervisor is practically forced to consider the individual in relation to others. Comparability creeps into the reasoning process as an inevitable consequence of the subjective, encompassing nature of this rating. For one thing, it is the rating which employees compare among themselves and thus can become a source of friction in the component. It is also the rating with which the reviewing official often disagrees, mainly because the latter is seeing the employee in a broader frame of reference. Subject to this kind of tugging and hauling, and probably figuring that this part of the rating is counter-productive anyway, the line supervisor reaches a practical solution as shown by the Tab A, Distribution of Ratings.

c. Regardless of the labels which management has chosen to attach to them, in practice our rating scale on overall performance means that Outstanding is one out of seven, Strong means equal to the majority, Proficient means below the majority, Adequate means unsatisfactory and Weak is non-existent. To add to the confusion, each higher level sees the individual in successively broader groups culminating in the ranking process at the Career Panels or Board level which is essentially comparing potential. However, the Fitness Report is still carrying the adjective rating of overall performance assigned by the first line supervisor from his limited perspective under the pressure of the daily working relationship and under the necessity of "getting out the work."

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2. It is small wonder that top management, which is "potential" oriented and "problem case" oriented becomes very upset with Fitness Reports when they want to take broad management actions like eliminating mediocrity and find that in essence most everybody is superior (average). The problem of reconciling the Fitness Reports from the standpoint of the first line supervisor level with the Fitness Report as documentation for broad management actions of an adverse nature is a hopeless one. The chances are that the greater the pressure to reconcile these two uses the less likely it will be that the Report serve either purpose.

3. It is doubtful that any training course will correct these environmental difficulties, particularly one which is premised on the simplistic assumption that if only our supervisors had more backbone our troubles would be over. A carefully handled training course might surface the problem but even this would be without significance unless the surfacing took place in a group consisting of the various management levels. A session worked into the management courses as part of the total management problem might be productive providing management is prepared to make some adjustments in their thinking. The position of the line supervisor is a particularly difficult one in the Agency since he has little authority insofar as hiring, firing and promoting is concerned, but nonetheless he is held responsible for the employee's work performance, for his 24-hour conduct, for his development on the job and for his failures.

4. Perhaps a frank acknowledgement of the comparable nature of the overall rating might tidy up the situation. Tab B is a suggestion which openly acknowledges comparability and provides a clue to the rater's frame of reference. Some redesign of the present form would be required, at which time it is suggested that the overall rating section be moved up one level to become the responsibility of the reviewing official. If this suggestion were to be adopted, it is recommended that the overall rating no longer be shown the individual just as his ranking is not made known to him. Such a policy would remove the line supervisor from the untenable position he is now in and place the responsibility with the authority.



Chief, Plans Division  
Office of Personnel

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